

PAUL STEPHENS

No opinion from me this month – just the early results from the all-important Most Popular Famous Last Words in Computing Chart of 1990. Last year's positions are in brackets.

1 (1) 'Won't be late, darling – I've just got one tiny bug left to sort out.'

Yes, last year's winner, the programmer's eternal favourite, beats all-comers yet again – it's really quite moving to see the old warhorse still winning after 27 consecutive years at the top. Its secret lies in its wide appeal – it doesn't matter what language you program in, you can still get caught with this one. New research indicates that bugs really can develop spontaneously in software approaching customer demonstrations, final acceptance tests and that episode of *Coronation Street* you've forgotten to set the video for.

Now in a modern, home-worker format, this entry has made some great appearances in the past, including the historic 'I'll get this working by Friday, Charles, or my name's not Ada', 'Was it the moon you guys wanted to go to? – hey, I hear Saturn's a really swell place to visit this time of year' and 'We've got the Control Center working great, now there's just the SQL interface to sort out.' Under threat from fourth generation languages and interactive debuggers, this could be its last year of supremacy, so savour this legend while you can.

2 (5) 'We've decided to install a computer in order to save money.'

A resurgence of support for this one as the recession begins to bite. As each generation discovers that computers never save you money, only give you the opportunity to maximise your efficiency, optimise your stock control and realise your sales potential, a new one pops up behind them. Starting out with visions of a mass P45-printing party for their newly-redundant staff, six months later they've had to send them all on expensive software training courses, and had to take on 50 percent more people as well, half of them a sinister breed with beards, glasses and an interest in real ale and restoring old Alfa Romeo sports cars. Sure to do well as the growth of Local Area Networks (LANs) brings multi-user business systems to a wider market – talking of which...



3 (-) 'Won't be long darling – we've just got to install the NetWare software and the job's finished.'

An amazingly high placing for a product-specific entry, this shows how much networking has grown in importance this year. Novell's *NetWare* network operating system is high-performance software of the old school – you compile it on site, using the manufacturer's proprietary machine-code assembler. With the 'grown up' versions it's a process best left to a skilled (that is, expensive) expert. Enough to bring tears to the eyes of an old hand who thought the golden days were gone for ever.

4 (4) 'I don't want anything too powerful.'

A consistent mid-chart performer, this one is a spin-off from the consumer electronics industry, although contrary to popular opinion, the computer version wasn't invented by Alan Sugar. In fact it was the work of an IBM executive who walked into Dixons looking for a transistor radio, and walked out with a 75 watts-per-channel twin-cassette FM/LW/MW/SW high-speed dubbing porta-breezblock weighing 50 lbs and costing twice that amount. He noted the

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technique, claimed it on expenses and a legend was born.

Some people say that this one's days are numbered by the maturity of the IBM PC design and the establishment of the 386-family software standard. We say 'SX, DX i486, MS-DOS, OS/2, UNIX, ISA, MCA, EISA, SCSI, EDSI and *Word for Windows*.'

5 (4) 'Won't be long, darling – I've just got to print out a small report.'

A fine example of an entry that's moved with the times. Everybody knows that all printers have a built-in sensor that makes them go wrong just when you need them to go right, but it's the way they've refined and developed the technique that's kept this one in the charts.

In the early days, the options were limited to simple paper-jams and the like. As more advanced features were introduced, the possibilities grew – perfect condensed print on the draft copy, a row of funny faces and a hex dump on the final version. Now that we have laser printers, with brains and memory of their own, the possibilities are endless – portrait printed as landscape, 'failure to download font – insufficient memory', and of course a quick re-print of the boss's confidential salaries table after he's left. It's this kind of product development that makes the computer industry so stimulating.

6 (8) 'To me it's just a tool, nothing more. There's no way I'm going to become a computer junkie, up all night playing games and with my head forever in a manual.'

This should in reality be number one, but so few people are willing to admit they've got a problem. If you find you're forsaking *Twin Peaks* for *Twin Floppies*, you need help – ring the number in the front of your telephone book.

More Famous Last Words er... Real Soon Now. Meanwhile, a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all our readers from all at PC PLUS. ●

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- Dos program structure & load process
- How viruses make use of these processes
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- viruses from the field
- Virus workshop & case studies
- The common viruses; recognition & effects
- Virus and anti-virus technology
- How you can protect your computers

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S&S International Limited
Computer Division
Berkeley Court, Mill Street,
Berkhamstead, Herts., HP4 2HB.
Tel: (0442) 877877 Fax: (0442) 877882